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## ***The GCC Briefing***

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Over the past two weeks the following news became the most important events with regard to politics, economics and the security of GCC states: **ten terrorists escaped and a policeman was killed during a prison break in Bahrain; Egypt recognised demarcation of borders with Saudi Arabia; Nabeel Rajab was re-arrested.**

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**Ten terrorists escaped and a policeman was killed during a prison break in Bahrain.** The Jau prison was attacked by five armed men. The responsibility for the assault was not claimed by any group. The Interior Ministry has started an immediate investigation into the incident, however the inmates have not been found yet. Three top officials have been suspended and put under investigation over the jailbreak.

**Egypt approved demarcation of borders with Saudi Arabia.** The Egyptian government recognised the boundaries of the maritime border agreement with Saudi Arabia. According to it, Egypt is to hand over the Red Sea's islands of Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi

Arabia. Although Egyptian lawyers filed a lawsuit against the transfer of the islands, Egypt's high court rejected an appeal and approved the transfer. The Egyptian security forces dispersed protests against the agreement.

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## Saudi Arabia

**Politics: Four Guantanamo Bay detainees were released and arrived in Saudi Arabia.**

The Yemeni prisoners were released from the US prison and transferred to Riyadh after Trump's call for a freeze on transfers was rejected by the White House. King Salman stated that they will remain in Saudi Arabia and fulfil a rehabilitation and de-radicalisation programme. 55 other detainees are still held in the military detention centre in Cuba.

**Security: The arrested kidnappers of a Saudi judge earlier appeared on the list of wanted terrorists.** The three offenders were arrested for taking part in the kidnap of a Saudi judge a month ago. They are also suspected in involvement of terrorist attacks in the Qatif province and the eastern city of Dammam, including attacks on citizens and security personnel.

**Security: Saudi Arabia and Mauritania signed a military agreement.** The deal is meant to establish a new era of military cooperation between the two states through cooperation in various military and medical fields, military training and information and logistical exchanges between the parties.

**Society: A Humanitarian aid campaign for Syrians was conducted in Saudi Arabia.** King Salman launched the campaign to collect 100 million riyals. The donations exceeded expectations and reached 279 million riyals within three days. King Salman was one of those who donated his own money (20 million riyals to the campaign in order to help those suffering in Syria. The campaign is a part of the aid and humanitarian programmes offered to the Syrian refugees by Saudi Arabia.

**Economy & Security: Saudi Arabia is to raise military spending by 6.7% in 2017.** It plans to invest \$50.8 billion in defence. The reasons for it are the Kingdom's fighting in Yemen and competition for a regional influence with Iran.

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## Bahrain

**Economy: \$32 billion infrastructure projects are to drive the Kingdom's economic growth in 2017.** Bahrain's non-oil economy increased by 3% in 2016 and is estimated to increase by 2.4 % in 2017 as the state carries on with its diversification efforts away from a reliance on oil revenues.

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## Kuwait

**Politics: Kuwait and Iraq signed four new agreements.** They are planned to strengthen bilateral cooperation in such areas as security, industry, culture and air travel. The Foreign Minister of Kuwait emphasised the improvement of talks between the states and the importance of the previous 49 bilateral agreements.

**Politics: Kuwait and Egypt signed a legal and judicial cooperation agreement.** It includes civil and commercial issues, criminal and personal status issues, the transfer of convicts as well as judicial cooperation in such fields as exchange of information and mutual visits and seminars.

**Society: Kuwait carried out relief aid campaigns for the Syrian refugees.** In order to mitigate their suffering at harsh winter temperatures, Kuwait Red Crescent Society provided 20 trucks of food, blankets, fuel and winter clothes to refugee camps. Medical care is provided to the Syrians by ten medical teams. Another Kuwaiti charity organisation Al-Rahma International Society installed three water-filling and purification stations in refugee camps on Turkish-Syrian borders.

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## Qatar

**Economy: The growth of the Qatar's economy rose to 3.9% in 2016.** GDP shrank by 2.9%, as a result of the drop in global hydrocarbon prices. Overall, the economic growth in the state was considered to be stable in 2016.

**Security: Qatar is to upgrade its missile defence system.** Qatar as well as Saudi Arabia, the UAE and the USA will get PAC-3 and PAC-3 MSE interceptors, which defends against incoming threats: aircraft, tactical ballistic missiles and cruise missiles among others.

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## United Arab Emirates

**Economy: UAE launched a new 2030 Dubai Industrial Strategy to produce \$44 billion for the emirate's economy.** It includes 75 initiatives in the six sectors: aerospace, maritime, aluminum and fabricated metals, pharmaceuticals and medical equipment, food and beverages and machinery and equipment.

**Economy: UAE petrol prices will increase in January following December fall.** In July the state renounced a system of fixed subsidised fuel prices in favour of adjusting prices monthly in response to global trends.

**Society: UAE delivered food assistance to the Yemeni people.** As a part of the relief programme, the Emirates Red Crescent delivered food to Perim Island's population to help territories liberated from Houthi militia and pro-Saleh forces.

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## Oman

**Politics: Oman joined the Saudi-led anti-terrorism Islamic coalition.** Other GCC states praised Oman's decision to become the 41<sup>st</sup> country to join the coalition.

**Economy: The Oman government is to limit jobs in 2017.** The recruitment in public sector will be limited due to the sharp decline of oil prices and higher spending on salaries and wages which led to challenges facing the budget.

**Society: Omani women achieved progress in municipal elections.** Seven women were elected to Oman municipal councils. Among 23 female candidates, the seven managed to get elected to local councils, which is three times more than in the previous elections.